>1: Roth--15-16 (No date) 1890 Tasmanians
116, 481, 283, 516

"Climbing Trees. --We have some good accounts of the manner in which the natives used to climb trees. Mr. Thirkell (Papers, etc. Roy. Soc. Tas. Aug. 1873) thus describes how this was accomplished. 'The mode of climbing trees was to get a grass band [16] twisted, put it round the tree, and hold the two ends in one hand, and then with a sharp flint stone they would chip the bark downwards and make a notch for the big toe, then change hands and do the same on the other side.'"

"Backhouse's description is more detailed. 'The climbing of the lofty, smooth-trunked gum trees, by the women, to obtain opossums, which lodge in the hollows of decayed branches, is one of the most remarkable feats I ever witnessed. This is effected without making any holes for the thumbs or great toes, as is common among the natives of New South Wales, except where the bark is rough and loose, at the base of the tree. In this a few notches are cut by means of a sharp flint or hatchet; the latter being preferred. A rope, twice as long as is necessary to encompass the tree, is then thrown around it. In former times this was made of tough grass, or strips of kangaroo-skin, but one of hemp is more generally used. The left hand is firmly twisted into one end of the rope, the middle of which is tightly grasped by the right, the hatchet is placed on the bare, closely-cropped head, and the feet are placed against the tree: a step or two is then advanced, and the body, at the same time, is brought into a posture so nearly exact as to admit the rope, by a compound motion, to be slackened, and at the same moment hitched a little further up the tree. By this means a woman will ascend a lofty tree, with a smooth thunk, almost as quickly as a man would go up a ladder. Should a piece of loose bark impede the ascent of the rope, the portion of rope held in the right hand is taken between the teeth, or swung behind the right leg and caught between the great and the fore toe and fixed against the tree. One hand is thus freed, to take the hatchet from the head, and with it to dislodge the loose bark. On arriving at a large limb, the middle of the rope is also secured in the left hand, and the loose end is thrown over the limb by the

right hand, by which also the end is caught, and the middle grasped, till the left hand is cleared. This is then wrapped into the middle of the rope, and the feet are brought up to the wrinkles of the bark, which exist below the large limbs. One end of the rope is then pulled downward, and this causes the other to ascend, so that, by an effort of the feet, the body is turned on the upper side of the limb of the tree. In descending, the woman places one arm on each side of the limb of the tree, and swings the rope with one hand till she catches it with the other; she then turns off the limb, and swings underneath it, till she succeeds in steadying herself with her feet against the trunk, around which she then throws the loose end [17] of the rope. Having secured this, she lets go the portion by which she was suspended under the limb, and descends in the manner in which she ascended. Although this is done with ease by women in vigour, one who had been out of health, but seemed recovered, could not get many steps off the ground, so that not only skill, but a considerable measure of strength, appears necessary to ascend the gigantic gum-trees.' Widowson's account (p. 190), on the other hand, describes a method of climbing trees which is accomplished without the use of the rope: 'They are extremely expert in climbing, and can reach the top of the largest forest trees, without the aid of branches: they effect this by means of a small sharp flint, which they clasp tightly in the ball of their four fingers, and, having cut a notch out of the bark, they

easily ascend, with the large toe of each foot in one notch, and their curiously manufactured hatchet in the other.' (1)"

"1. It has been said that the notches cut in the trees were about 3½ feet apart."

1: Roth--19 [2] (No date) 1890 Tasmanians
116, 481, 516

"Their quickness is further vouched for by an account of Péron (p. 221) during one of the excursions, 'We arrived at a small creek, at the end of which was a pretty valley.... We had hardly set foot ashore before two aborigines showed themselves at the top of a hillock precipitous almost to the top. At the signs of friendship we made them, one of them threw himself, rather than descended, from the top of the rock, and in the twinkling of an eye was in our midst.' Rossel (I. ch. iv. p. 99) gives an account of a woman who on being frightened slipped down from the top of a rock on to the sea-shore, and La Billardière adds (ch. v. p. 234), this precipice was forty feet high, and that the woman ran away and was soon hidden by the rocks below. Of their nimbleness in another direction West (p. 85) tells how some aborigines 'did' some Europeans: 'A shooting party approached a native camp near the Clyde, and found they had just abandoned their half-cooked opossums and their spears: excepting a small group of wattle bushes, at the distance of ten yards, the ground was free of all but the lofty trees: the travellers immediately scoured this thicket, but on turning round they, in great astonishment, discovered that opossums and spears were all gone. It was the work of a moment, but no traces of the aborigines were to be seen.'"

I: Roth--20 [2] (No date) 1890 Tasmanians
116, 481, 177, 516

"When they came in contact with the Europeans, their knowledge of the power of climbing did not come amiss, for Mr. Meredith relates (p. 206) that 'a wounded native woman having been shut up for the night in a hut, the latter was visited in the early morning to see how the patient fared; but, though the door had been closed and fastened, the chimney had not and up it the dark lady had gone,' while on an earlier occasion La Billardière (II. pp. 39-40) found himself watched from an unexpected quarter, thus: 'I had not perceived the young girls for some time; ... but, happening to look behind me, I saw, with surprise, seven who had perched themselves on a stout limb of a tree, more than three yards from the ground, whence they attentively watched our slightest movements.'"

1: Roth--23-24 (No date) 1890 Tasmanians
116, 481, 516

"Péron seems to have taken considerable trouble to ascertain the true state of the physical powers of the aborigines, and collected, so far as he could, all the details which would in any way tend to throw light on this subject. He records (pp. 235-236) that on one occasion M. Maurouard, one of the midshipmen, on Bruny Island 'had proposed to one amongst them, who seemed the most robust, to wrestle with him; and that the Van Diemen's Lander had accepted the challenge; was several times thrown by the French middy, and forced to acknowledge his inferiority.' On another occasion, also on Bruny Island, he relates (p. 256): 'It was not long before we encountered two women, who, from the top of a neighbouring hill, were directing their steps towards the sea-shore. [24] ... My companions started to pursue them, but had hardly gone 200 paces when the women, whom they thought easily to overtake, were already out of sight: this I had predicted beborehand, having had several opportunities of convincing myself that the inhabitants of these shores were in general much swifter in running than we were.'"

"Contrary to Péron, La Billardière states (II. ch. x. p. 49) that the European could run better than the natives, but the circumstances of the race which we give tend to show that this was not a fair test: 'Four young girls, also, were of the party . . . They ran races several times on the shore . . . and some of us endeavoured to catch them; when we had the pleasure to see, that Europeans could frequently run better than these savages. West (p. 36) says: 'They were swift of foot; when they possessed dogs, they ran nearly abreast of them . . . and were generally in at the death.' La Billardière also gives an account (II. ch. x. pp. 41, 42), showing that the aborigines were not capable of continued exertion: 'At length we parted with our new guides, whose pace was sufficiently slow for us to follow them with ease. It seemed as if they were not accustomed to take a long walk without interruption; for we had scarcely been half an hour on our way, before they invited us to sit down, saying mèdi, and we immediately stopped. This halt lasted but a few minutes when they rose, saying to us tangara, which signifies, 'let us set off.' On this we resumed our journey; and they made us halt again, in the same manner, four times at nearly equal distances.' This weakness is corroborated by Davies (p. 415): 'The aborigines are capable of great but not of lasting exertion. They cannot stand continued fatigue equal to a hearty European.' "

1: Roth--31 [2]
116, 176, 481, 181

(No date) 1890

Tasmanians

"West's opinion of them was (II. p. 88), 'Their intellectual character is low; yet not so inferior as often described. They appeared stupid, when addressed on subjects which had no relation to their mode of life; but they were quick and cunning within their own sphere. Their locomotion sharpened their powers of observation, without much increasing their ideas.' Backhouses' opinion was very similar (pp. 173-174), 'After having seen something of the natives of Van Diemen's Land, the conviction was forced upon my mind, that they exceeded Eurpoeans in skill, in those things to which their attention had been directed from childhood.' Melville (p. 348) bears witness to a like effect: 'They occasionally afforded sufficient proof that their intellectual powers were of no mean order.'"

1: Roth--112-113 (No date) 1890 Tasmanians
116, 224, 462, 481

"The catching of an opossum was a more difficult matter. West (II. p. 85) says: 'The opossum was hunted by the women, who by a glance discovered if the animal were to be found in the tree,' and Backhouse (p. 172) refers to such a hunt in the following terms: 'The climbing of the lofty smooth-trunked gum trees, by the women to obtain opossums, which lodge in the hollows of decayed branches, is one of the most remarkable feats I ever witnessed.' Davies (p. 413) describes the capture in this way: 'The natives, especially the women, get opossums by climbing trees. Their senses [113] of seeing and hearing are particularly acute, and a glance will suffice to tell them when there is an opossum in the tree. They always carried with them a small rope, made of kangaroo sinews, and their mode of climbing the trees was as follows: They first, as high as they could conveniently reach, cut a notch with a sharp stone in the side of the tree, then threw the bight of the rope up, and leaning back, it held against the tree by their weight, until with its assistance the climber got his right great toe into the notch that had been cut; then grasping the tree with his left arm, the rope by a sudden jerk is thrown higher up the tree, a fresh notch is cut for the left toe, and so the climber proceeds. If branches interfere, they are a hindrance to the climber, but he then throws the end of the rope over it, and holding both ends raises himself up.'"

"According to Lloyd (pp. 46-47): 'The method of catching the climbing opossum. . . is, notwithstanding the imminent danger which attends it, an extremely interesting sight to mere bystanders. The thrilling exclamation of "Wah! Wah! Wah!" denoting that traces had been discovered of the cat-taloned animal having very recently ascended the tree, soon brought other natives to the spot: whereupon--the most cunning in such matters deciding in council that the impressions made on the smooth bark were of the preceding night--one of the boldest and most agile of the hunters prepared to ascend the formidable-looking blue gum. The flint tomahawk and the strong hay-band supplied the want of a ladder. . . . The strong wire-grass rope, made into close three-strand plait, being passed round the tree and tied in a loop sufficiently large, the native placed himself within it; then with his tomahawk he made a slightly roughed score in the bark, into which, inserting his muscular great toe only, he steadily and unerringly raised himself upright. The band was then dexterously jerked higher up the trunk; another score made and so on, until he had succeeded in reaching the required height. The scores or steps were never less than three feet and a half apart. Having scaled the tree, the next feat was to follow the tracks of the opossum along some bare projecting branch; upon which the native walked upright and confident, as if he also resided amidst the boughs of towering gums. The snug domicile of the opossum being discovered, the ticklish operation came of thrusting

in the bare arm into the hollowed branch, pulling him out by the tail, and tossing him from the dizzy height into the midst of the eager hunters who were assembled round the tree. Frequently, [114] however, the wary little animal... would retreat from its nest, and perching itself... at the extreme end of the branch, would remain till fairly shaken off by its ruthless pursuer.' 'When the opossum was got out of a hole in the tree, they would knock its head against the tree and throw it down. Those below would catch it up if not dead' (Thirkell). Bass, although he did not see an opossum hunted, considered that the trees were climbed by means of the rope, 'for once, at the foot of a notched tree, about eight feet of a two inch rope made of grass was found with a knot in it, near which it appeared to have broken' (Collins, p. 169). He also had seen notched trees (ibid, p. 188). Tasman and his crew, in 1642, had also seen these notches, and reported them to be five feet apart (Gell, II. pp. 323-325)."

1: Roth--114 (No date) 1890 Tasmanians
116, 224, 262, 481, 462

"'Adhering to the rocks... the Mutton-fish are met with abundantly. These are often taken in deep water by the native women, who dive for them, and force them from the rocks by means of a wooden chisel. They put them into an oval bag, and bring them up suspended round their necks' (Backhouse, p. 103). The same author continues, on another occasion: 'In the afternoon we went... on a fishing excursion.... Some of the women went into the water among the large sea-tangle, to take crayfish. These women seem quite at home in the water, and frequently immerse their faces to enable them to see objects at the bottom. When they discover the object of their search, they dive, often using the long stems of the kelp to enable them to reach the bottom; these they handle as dexterously in descending as a sailor would a rope in ascending' (Backhouse, p. 168)."

1: Roth--164 [2] (No date) 1890 Tasmanians
116, 481, 562, 516

"We have just seen above that in the use of their floats a native swims on each side, holding the float with one hand. Calder says (Journ. p. 23): 'Some of the men, unlike the women, were not always good swimmers, though most of them were perfect.' La Billardière 'wishing to know whether these islanders were expert swimmers, one of our officers jumped into the water, and dived several times; but it was in vain that he invited them to follow his example. They are very good divers, however, ...for it is by diving that they procure a considerable part of their food' (II. ch. x. pp. 51-52). Later on he was more successful, and thus describes a diving scene: 'Hitherto we had but a faint idea of the pains the women take to procure the food.... They took each a basket, and were followed by their daughters, who did the same. Getting on the rocks that projected into the sea, they plunged from them to the bottom in search of shell-fish. When they had been down some time, we became very uneasy on their account. ...At length, however, they appeared, and convinced us they were capable of remaining under water twice as long as our ablest divers. An instant was sufficient for them to take breath, and then they dived again. This they did repeatedly till their baskets were nearly full' (II. ch. x. p. 57)."

1: Roth--164- 165
116, 481, 562, 516

(No date) 1890

Tasmanians

"Backhouse speaks thus of their diving powers (p. 168): 'Some of the women went into the water... to take crayfish. These women seem quite at home in the water, and frequently immerse their faces to enable them to see objects at the bottom. When they discover the object of their search, they dive, often using the long stems of the kelp, to enable them to reach the bottom.' [165] Backhouse mentions that 'two white men being in danger of drowning on a raft, some of the native women... swam to the raft, and begged the men to get upon their backs, and they would convey them to the shore; but the poor men refused, being overcome with fear' (p. 147); and on another occasion that 'two women waded and swam from Green Island to the Settlement--a distance of three miles' (p. 89). Mr. Meredith mentions that 'a native women, to avoid being captured, rushed into the sea, where she swam and dived for some time, before she could be induced to come ashore' (p. 205). Davies speaks of the women 'being generally, if not at all times, the divers' (p. 413). With the exception therefore of Calder, no writer speaks of the men as swimmers."